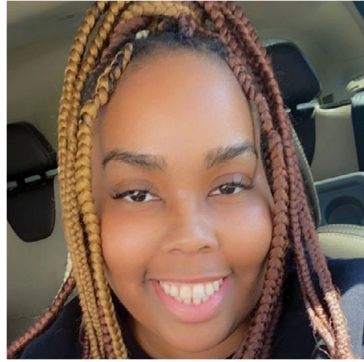


# MISSOURI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL



2022 ANNUAL REPORT



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## MISSOURI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

Mission Statement .....	3
Letter From the Chair .....	4
State Rehabilitation Council .....	5
Council's Purpose .....	6

## MISSOURI VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Vision, Mission, and Principles .....	7
Letter to the Governor .....	8
Highlights .....	9
Agency Overview .....	10

## MAJOR TOPICS

Partnering .....	13
Services .....	15
Success Stories: Aubriea Townley .....	18
Success Stories: Eric Adams .....	19
Success Stories: Rhea Willis .....	20

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Satisfaction Survey .....	21
Program Data .....	23
Offices .....	25

**Note:** This annual report for calendar year 2022 covers information and data from Program Year (PY) 2021 (July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022).



Photo of the St. Louis Iron Mountain Railway in Jackson provided by Wayne Clause.

# MISSION STATEMENT

## MISSOURI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

### OUR VISION

The Missouri State Rehabilitation Council envisions a society that values all of its members equally and provides opportunities so that all people are able to meet their needs, fulfill their dreams, and participate in society.

### OUR MISSION

To ensure that persons with disabilities have opportunities to be as productive as possible by advising Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation that services provided to persons with disabilities are:

- of the highest quality.
- consumer directed.
- responsive to consumer choice.
- effective.
- individualized.
- culturally specific and relevant to labor market trends.

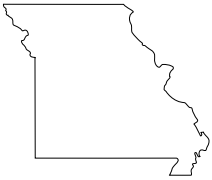
### OUR RESPONSIBILITIES

To work in partnership with Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation to achieve positive outcomes for persons with disabilities by:

- providing input on the state plan, policies, and practices affecting services to persons with disabilities.
- obtaining and interpreting consumer input.
- identifying corrective action consistent with that input.
- advocating for adequate resources to ensure that the rehabilitation needs of all Missourians are met.
- identifying strategies to address the needs of people who are not being served or who are being underserved.
- supporting VR in complying with laws applicable to persons with disabilities.

*(Adopted Nov. 4, 1999)*

# LETTER FROM THE CHAIR



## MISSOURI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

3024 Dupont Circle ■ Jefferson City, Missouri 65109  
Phone: 573-751-3251 ■ Fax: 573-751-1441

**Lori Pace**, Rogersville  
Chairperson

**Earl Brown**, Salem  
Vice Chairperson

**Daniel Cayou**, Jefferson City

**Diana Eakright**, Independence

**Karen Gridley**, Kansas City

**Bob Hosutt**, Nixa

**Debby Loveall-Stewart**, Joplin

**Lydia Mitchell**, Florissant

**Gary Otten**, St. Louis

**Sarah Prechtel**, St. Louis

**Patricia Runge**, Tuscumbia

**Jennifer Stanfield**, St. Louis

**Tim Tadlock**, Gallatin

**Yvonne Wright**, New Bloomfield

**Chris Clause**, California  
Ex Officio Member  
VR Assistant Commissioner

December 30, 2022

The Honorable Michael L. Parson  
Governor of Missouri  
State Capitol  
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Governor Parson:

On behalf of the members of the Missouri State Rehabilitation Council, it is my honor to present the Council's annual report for 2022. In these pages, you will find the progress made by Missouri citizens who were served by vocational rehabilitation programs.

Each Council member has unique experiences in advocating for the rights of our fellow Missourians whose physical or mental disabilities may pose barriers to productive employment. Through our quarterly meetings and committee deliberations, we have given our support to Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation to empower individuals with disabilities and to encourage decisions that lead to greater self-sufficiency.

We have advised Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation on innovative programming to reach the underserved populations in the state and on exploring additional methods of obtaining consumer satisfaction feedback.

It has been my great privilege to work with members of the Council as well as with Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation staff, all of whom are dedicated to providing our citizens with the opportunity to make choices in obtaining meaningful employment. Employment is a vital key to independence and equality.

Respectfully,

Lori Pace  
Chairperson

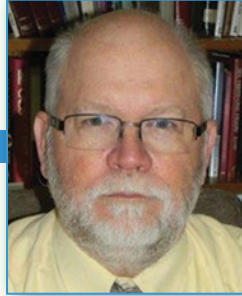
# STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

## CHAIRPERSON



**LORI PACE**  
Rogersville

## VICE CHAIRPERSON



**EARL BROWN**  
Salem

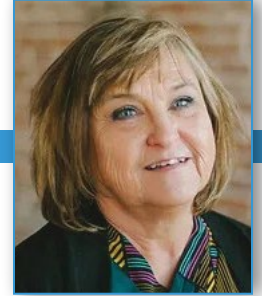
## EX OFFICIO MEMBER



**CHRIS CLAUSE**  
California



**DANIEL CAYOU**  
Jefferson City



**DIANA EAKRIGHT**  
Independence



**KAREN GRIDLEY**  
Kansas City



**BOB HOSUTT**  
Nixa



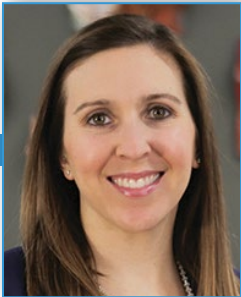
**DEBBY LOVEALL-STEWART**  
Joplin



**LYDIA MITCHELL**  
Florissant



**GARY OTTEN**  
St. Louis



**SARAH PRECHTEL**  
St. Louis



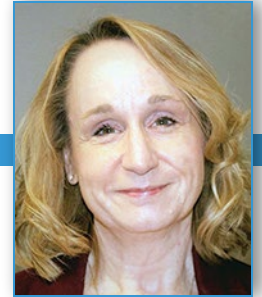
**PATRICIA RUNGE**  
Tuscumbia



**JENNIFER STANFIELD**  
St. Louis



**TIM TADLOCK**  
Gallatin



**YVONNE WRIGHT**  
New Bloomfield



# COUNCIL'S PURPOSE

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was first authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended in 2014 (referred to hereafter as the Act). Section 105 of the Act requires the state vocational rehabilitation agency to establish a council.

The SRC was initially formed on June 1, 1993. Members are appointed by the governor and serve no more than two consecutive three-year terms. As required by the Act, SRC members represent the Statewide Independent Living Council; the Parent Training and Information Center; the Client Assistance Program; the Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program; the Office of Special Education, which is the state agency responsible for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; the Missouri Workforce Development Board; community rehabilitation program service providers; disability advocacy groups; current or former applicants/recipients of vocational rehabilitation services; and business, industry, and labor.

The SRC is responsible for reviewing, analyzing, and advising VR regarding its performance on such issues as eligibility; the extent, scope, and effectiveness of services; and any other functions affecting people with disabilities. Full SRC meetings are held quarterly on the first Thursday of February, May, August, and November. Subcommittees meet as needed throughout the year.

During 2022, the SRC was actively involved with VR in the activities below:

Reviewed and provided recommendations to VR regarding the combined state plan's comprehensive statewide needs assessment, goals, priorities, performance accountability measures, and comprehensive system of personnel development

Provided recommendations to VR on policy revisions and rule changes

Participated in and reviewed feedback from VR public hearings to provide input on the combined state plan

Evaluated and provided recommendations on the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services and satisfaction with those services

Reviewed hearing decisions and mediation outcomes

Assisted VR staff in preparing the SRC's annual report for the governor and the commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration on the status of vocational rehabilitation services in Missouri

Provided comments to VR regarding issues pertaining to waiting lists (Order of Selection)

Coordinated and participated in presentations and activities with other councils and agencies including the Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Client Assistance Program, the Statewide Independent Living Council, the Department of Mental Health, the Parent Training and Information Center, Missouri Assistive Technology, the Hearing Loss Association, the Governor's Council on Disability, the Office of Workforce Development, and the Office of Special Education

# — VISION, MISSION, AND PRINCIPLES —

## MISSOURI VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

### VISION

Transforming lives through a great VR experience for everyone

### MISSION

Empowering people with disabilities through employment

### OPERATING PRINCIPLES

We will:

- Act with a sense of urgency.
- Provide quality customer service.
- Maximize our resources.
- Do the right thing.
- Put people first.
- Continuously evaluate our practices/processes.



# LETTER TO THE GOVERNOR



Office of Adult Learning and  
Rehabilitation Services

Chris Clause, Ph.D. • *Assistant Commissioner*

3024 Dupont Circle • Jefferson City, MO 65109 • [vr.dese.mo.gov](http://vr.dese.mo.gov)

December 30, 2022

The Honorable Michael L. Parson  
Governor of Missouri  
State Capitol  
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Governor Parson:

The annual report presented to you from the Missouri State Rehabilitation Council for 2022 provides information on the Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation employment program for individuals with disabilities.

Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation has operated under an Order of Selection since October 2003 due to the number of applicants requesting services, rising service costs, and limited federal funding. The Rehabilitation Act requires eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities to receive services first. All other eligible individuals receive services as funds become available.

During Program Year 2021, Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation helped 3,843 individuals reach successful employment outcomes.

Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation works closely with school districts across the state. The program annually provides transition services, including pre-employment transition services, to approximately 12,000 high school students and youths with disabilities.

Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation grant dollars expended for purchased client services from community vendors are effective and help local economies. In addition, the total annual increase in earnings for individuals with successful outcomes was over \$67 million. The program's customer satisfaction survey results are consistently among the top in the nation.

In closing, the Council and I offer our sincere appreciation for your personal interest and support in serving people with disabilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "C. Clause".

Chris Clause, Ph.D.  
Assistant Commissioner, Office of Adult Learning and Rehabilitation Services



# HIGHLIGHTS



**31,497**  
individuals worked  
with VR counselors.



**1,379**  
successfully employed  
individuals received supported  
employment services.



**3,843**  
individuals achieved successful  
employment outcomes.



**524**  
successfully employed individuals  
received Individual Placement  
and Support services.



**2,376**  
individuals achieved a  
measurable skill gain in an  
educational or training program.



**98%**  
of successfully employed individuals  
had significant disabilities.



**1,680**  
youths reached successful  
employment outcomes.



**\$67,544,568**  
was the total annual increase  
in earnings for individuals  
with successful outcomes.

# AGENCY OVERVIEW

Prepared on behalf of the SRC, this annual report highlights various programs and services of VR during Program Year (PY) 2021 from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022. With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, VR services will now be reported on a federal program year rather than a federal fiscal year.

Due to insufficient funds to serve all eligible individuals, VR operates under an Order of Selection with three priority categories. Eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities are required by law to receive services first (Category 1). Eligible individuals who have less significant disabilities are required to be placed on a waiting list for services (Categories 2 and 3).

During PY 2021, VR counselors worked with more than 31,000 individuals in various categories and helped 3,843 individuals reach a successful employment outcome. On an average daily basis, VR served more than 11,000 individuals.

## STATE FUNDING AND THE SOCIAL SECURITY REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM

VR receives state funding from the general revenue fund, the Missouri Lottery, and the Department of Mental Health. The match requirement is 21.3 percent state funding and 78.7 percent federal funding.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) reimburses state vocational rehabilitation agencies for the costs of providing services to assist SSA disability recipients in becoming gainfully employed. Ticket Tracker software is used to interface with VR's case-management system. The software matches and identifies individuals receiving SSA disability benefits whom VR helped in reaching their employment goals. Ticket Tracker has streamlined the consumer identification and reimbursement submission process, enabling VR to receive SSA reimbursements in a more timely and efficient manner. In PY 2021, VR received \$3,930,769 in reimbursement claims. A portion of this funding helps support the Centers for Independent Living in Missouri.

## WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) strengthens the workforce development system by aligning and improving employment, training, and education programs. Areas in which WIOA affects the VR program include employment for individuals with disabilities, employer relationships, services for youths and students with disabilities, and collaboration with other federal and state agencies and partners.



**Aaron Matthes** completed Job Point's Highway/Heavy Construction certificate program and received VR's assistance in securing work at a local company as a driver/laborer. He won Job Point's Award of Excellence in June.



**Eric Stracke** works as a nutrition associate at the University of Missouri Health Care system in Columbia.

# AGENCY OVERVIEW

With regard to VR, WIOA focuses on providing services to individuals with disabilities, including youths and students with disabilities, to assist them in achieving competitive, integrated employment. VR continues to help individuals with disabilities prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment. VR is committed to developing new relationships with employers and providing flexible strategies like on-the-job training, internships, apprenticeships, and customized employment. VR works with other agencies to create a combined state plan that describes how VR and its partners will collaboratively deliver integrated services to Missouri's job seekers, workers, and employers under WIOA.

## COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

VR and the SRC jointly conduct an annual comprehensive statewide assessment of the rehabilitation needs of Missourians. The conclusions and recommendations of the assessment are incorporated into VR's goals and priorities for the purpose of improving services.

VR uses many methods to collect information for the assessment including customer satisfaction surveys, public hearings, VR strategic teams, SRC input, VR case data, and national census statistics.

Two areas that the assessment specifically focuses on are the needs of individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals from populations that have been traditionally unserved or underserved by vocational rehabilitation programs. The PY 2021 needs assessment identified the minority populations of Hispanics and African-Americans, along with individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI), and justice and foster care involved students with disabilities, as underserved. Figure 1 (page 12) reflects the closure percentages by ethnicity for PY 2021.

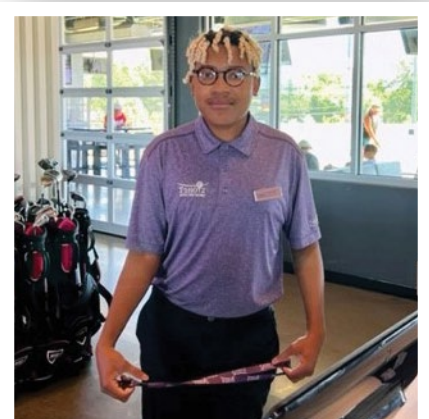
VR remains committed to improving services for underserved populations, increasing their employment outcomes, and reducing the number of individuals from these populations who drop out prior to receiving services.

VR utilizes the following strategies to address these areas of need:

- A diversity consultant is employed to assist with improving services to underserved areas, developing training programs, and establishing outreach strategies for individuals from diverse cultures.
- The Cultural Diversity Team (composed of the diversity consultant, VR management, and district office staff) meets throughout the year to develop strategies for serving individuals from diverse cultures. A subcommittee focuses on the recruitment of a diverse and inclusive workforce.



At the August SRC meeting, some Council members attended in person while others joined via video conferencing. Due to the ongoing pandemic, a hybrid meeting model is currently being utilized.



**Justin Clay**, a student at Liberty High School, participated in a summer work experience program at T-Shotz golf range in Kansas City. VR worked with Liberty, T-Shotz, and Easterseals Midwest to provide the work experience.





**Richard Gotsch** received VR's assistance and is employed by a manufacturing company.

- Multiple pilot projects have been developed to provide peer mentoring to students with disabilities involved in the justice and foster care systems, along with homeless and housing-insecure youths.
- Employees are provided with training opportunities on cultural competency that cover aspects of diversity.
- An autism services liaison has been appointed to serve as a resource for staff throughout the state. This liaison works with providers on strategies for better serving individuals with ASD.
- Employment Services Plus has been developed. This program is designed to assist individuals with ASD, TBI, or deafness/hearing loss who require additional supports to reach successful employment outcomes.

The assessment also addresses the necessities of youths and students with disabilities, including their need for pre-employment or other transition services. One of VR's goals is to increase the number of students with disabilities who access VR services. For strategy information on this area of need, see page 15.

## CLOSURE PERCENTAGES BY ETHNICITY: PY 2021

STATUS	WHITE	AFRICAN-AMERICAN	OTHER
3,843 successful employment outcomes	76%	18%	6%
3,077 closed unsuccessfully after services	71%	23%	6%
2,662 closed after eligibility before services	72%	21%	7%

**Figure 1**

# PARTNERING

## WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT PARTNERS

WIOA requires the alignment of core programs in order to provide coordinated and streamlined services. These core programs are VR; Rehabilitation Services for the Blind; Adult Education and Literacy; Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth; and Wagner-Peyser Employment Services. (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is a combined partner.) Teams composed of representatives from WIOA core partner programs, as well as other partner organizations, have been formed to develop strategies for serving mutual clients. These teams have identified focus areas, such as best practices and agency cross-trainings, that can be shared statewide and at the local level. All program partners strive to improve the workforce system and services to job seekers, employees, and employers.

VR collaborates, coordinates, and cooperates with partner programs to ensure that individuals with disabilities benefit from seamless access to career services, education, and training. VR also participates in business services teams within the workforce system to better serve employers' needs. VR offers a dual-customer approach by supporting its job candidates and businesses in order to achieve successful outcomes for both.

## CENTERS FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are community-based nonresidential programs designed to promote independent living for people with disabilities. In Missouri, 22 CILs offer independent living services. The CILs are funded through federal and state independent living grants and are managed by local boards composed of individuals with disabilities who have been successful in establishing their own independent lifestyles. VR and the CILs work together on a regular basis to share referrals and provide services to mutual clientele. A number of CILs have VR district office staff as active board members. VR and the CILs have developed a summer work experience program to provide pre-employment transition services. The CILs offer students who are potentially eligible for VR services access to job exploration activities, workplace-readiness training, social support, and instruction on self-advocacy (including peer mentoring). Last summer, six CILs were involved in the program and worked with 35 students.

## MISSOURI REENTRY PROCESS

VR participates in the Missouri Reentry Process, which encourages collaboration among government and local agencies to improve the transition of offenders leaving prison and returning to local communities and work. State government agencies are the Departments of Corrections, Economic Development, Elementary and Secondary Education, Health and Senior Services, Mental Health, Public Safety, Revenue, Social Services, Transportation, and the Office of the State Courts Administrator. Other partnering agencies include the federal probation system along with local law enforcement, faith-based organizations, service providers, and treatment programs.



**Ja'Shaun Owens**, a student at Park Hill South High School, participated in a summer work experience program at Pizza Ranch in Kansas City that led to permanent employment. VR worked with Park Hill, Pizza Ranch, and Easterseals Midwest to provide the work experience.

VR also is participating in a pilot program with the Departments of Corrections, Social Services, and Higher Education and Workforce Development. VR provides career counseling and coordinating services with other agencies for pre-release offenders with disabilities in order to assist them in finding employment and returning to their communities.

### DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

The Department of Mental Health's (DMH) Divisions of Behavioral Health (DBH) and Developmental Disabilities (DD) have been longstanding partners with VR in assisting eligible individuals seeking vocational rehabilitation services in order to gain employment. Partnership activities include the funding of DB101, a customized Missouri benefits-planning website. Cross-system collaboration remains ongoing through system change initiatives, grant and technical support opportunities, and local/regional trainings. VR has appointed a DMH liaison, and DMH has representation on WIOA teams consisting of combined partner programs and other partner agencies.

In partnership with DBH, Individual Placement and Support (IPS), an evidence-based supported employment service for adults with mental illness, has been a focus. IPS requires close program and clinical relationships between local mental health and vocational rehabilitation staff to ensure success.

VR also is partnering with DD and other agencies to provide a customized employment program that promotes the specific abilities of individuals with disabilities in order to meet employers' needs.

### COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

VR and community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) collaboratively work with an outcome-based service model that emphasizes quality employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. CRPs are nonprofit organizations accredited by recognized professional associations that have developed commonly accepted processes for evaluating employment-related services. All independently owned and operated, CRPs provide services that may include vocational planning, job development and placement services, skills training, specialized employment services, supported employment, and transition services.

VR and its CRP partners have implemented several projects to improve services. During summer 2022, a six-week work experience program for students with disabilities was held. Thirty-four CRPs, 868 VR-eligible students, and more than 200 schools participated at 250 employment sites. Collaboration and partnership are cornerstones of the relationship between VR and CRPs and have fostered an environment of creativity and innovation. The VR-CRP steering committee meets regularly to review progress on their organizations' joint projects and on service delivery.





**Madison Hall** (front) and **Alexcia Warren** (back), students at Kennett High School, participated in a summer work experience program at Harps Food Store in Kennett. VR worked with the school, Harps, and MERS Missouri Goodwill Industries of Poplar Bluff to provide the experience.

## TRANSITION SERVICES

WIOA places a significant emphasis on services to youths and students. The law's intent is to ensure that young individuals with disabilities are better prepared and have more opportunities for competitive, integrated employment. WIOA requires that VR (in collaboration with local education agencies) provide pre-employment transition services to eligible or potentially eligible students ages 16 to 21. These services include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs, workplace-readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy (including peer mentoring).

VR has helped to develop and implement innovative programs to provide pre-employment transition services. VR also has established partnerships with the University of Missouri's College of Education, CILs, CRPs, businesses, and local school districts. With its partners, VR is expanding pre-employment transition services to all parts of the state. During PY 2021, over 9,600 potentially eligible students received at least one pre-employment transition service.

VR provides youths with disabilities ages 14 to 24 a variety of other transition services such as job placement, supported employment, training, and rehabilitation technology. A team of professionals from VR, local school districts, and other agencies has been assembled to offer support and technical assistance on these services.

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Disability Categories of Those Served: PY 2021

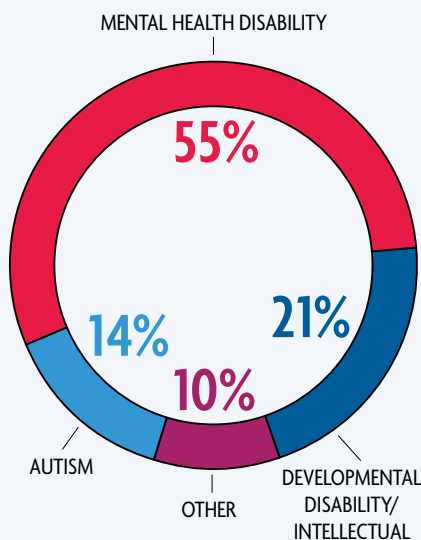


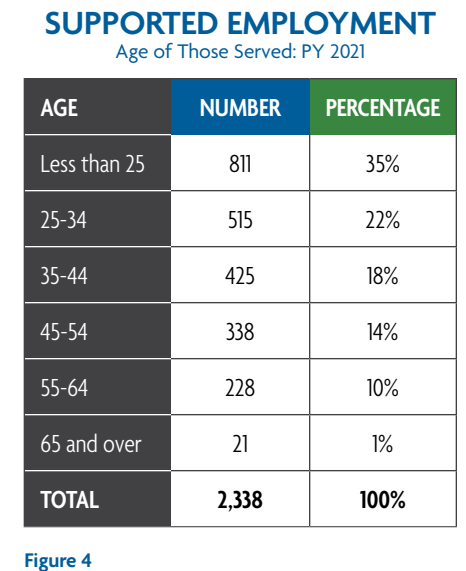
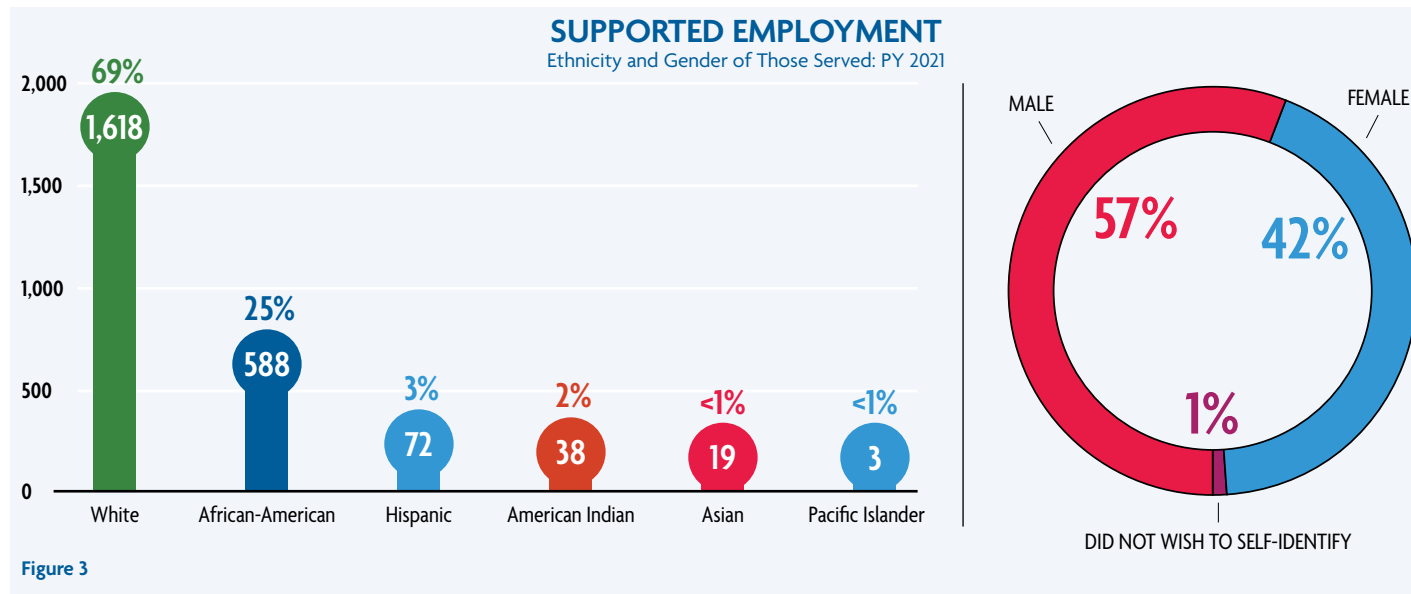
Figure 2

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

VR provides supported employment (SE) services to a diverse population as indicated by Figures 2-5 (pages 15-16). Some of these services are jointly provided by DMH DBH-DD. SE is defined as competitive work in an integrated work setting with ongoing support services for individuals with the most significant disabilities. During PY 2021, 1,379 individuals who received SE services and exited the program were successfully employed.

In PY 2021, VR worked with 121 CRP locations that provide SE services and cover all counties in Missouri. An outcome-based model of SE services is used that features a period of discovery and exploration with the individual to develop vocational direction and community-based job exploration. Outcomes include job placement, 30 days of independent employment, and 90 days of employment. In addition to these milestones, on-the-job and off-site supports may also be authorized.

VR places an emphasis on the development of natural support systems to help individuals participating in supported employment successfully remain in the workforce. These natural supports help to reduce the cost of providing SE services. Figure 5 (page 16) shows the average cost of services, hourly wages, and other statistics for supported employment.



## OTHER SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS: PY 2021

Average cost of supported employment services per person .....	\$1,528
Average hourly wage per person .....	\$11.92
Average hours per week worked per person .....	24
Successful outcomes .....	1,379
Total participants .....	2,338

Figure 5

**Note:** All information in figures 2-5 applies to supported employment (SE) services only.

## REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY

In PY 2021, VR provided a variety of rehabilitation technology services, assistive devices, and equipment to 635 individuals who received services and exited the program. VR purchases assistive devices to help with increasing, maintaining, or improving functional capabilities. Devices could include hearing aids and other personal listening and communication devices, vehicle and home modifications, wheelchairs, and other powered mobility equipment. Rehabilitation technology services include consultation, evaluation, design, customization, adaptation, maintenance, repair, therapy, and technical training.

VR and Missouri Assistive Technology (MoAT) have collaborated to develop a cooperative agreement to ensure the maximum statewide utilization of services. The agreement provides a plan for service coordination; for using resources to the best advantage; for information sharing, technical support, and training; to facilitate the referral of potentially eligible individuals between agencies; and to help eligible people obtain rehabilitation technology services. A VR staff member is a representative on the MoAT Advisory Council.

In April, MoAT presented the Power Up 2022 Assistive Technology Conference and Expo. The conference was open to service providers, consumers, independent living specialists, VR staff and other professionals in the rehabilitation field. Twenty VR staff members attended the event. The conference was successful in providing an opportunity to view state-of-the-art technology and equipment designed to enhance and promote independence and quality of life.

Several VR professionals have specialized caseloads in the area of rehabilitation technology. Located throughout Missouri are five VR counselors and one assistant director who are skilled in manual communication for the deaf and hard of hearing. VR employs a director and assistant director of rehabilitation technology who assist staff statewide on delivering rehabilitation technology services.

VR utilizes assistive technology demonstration sites located at CILs across the state for exploring, reviewing, and demonstrating various devices, services, and resources that are available to individuals with alternative communication needs. VR counselors are allowed to borrow rehabilitation technology equipment from MoAT for individuals to test before purchase.



District Supervisor **Sara Cleaveland** (left) and Assistant District Supervisor **Luke Daily** (right) from the Columbia VR office presented *A Day in the Life of a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor* during November's SRC meeting. VR Counselor II **Kristen Jeffries** also took part in the presentation.



## AUBRIEA TOWNLEY

The winter of 2020 was a trying time for many, but Aubriea Townley of St. Louis had to endure a particularly difficult kind of isolation. She was hospitalized in December 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, she thought she had a stomach flu, but she was in and out of the hospital for several months. For a long stretch, she was unable to have anyone visit.

“It was very, very depressing,” she said.

Aubriea’s body became so weak she was unable to pick up small objects and needed a wheelchair for mobility. She had been working as a pharmacy technician but was unable to continue in that role due to her ongoing health issues. Eventually, Aubriea was diagnosed with a form of Guillian-Barre syndrome, a rare condition that causes the body’s immune system to attack the nerves. It causes weakness and fatigue and, in its most severe form, can lead to paralysis.

Aubriea was referred to VR, which provided guidance and counseling along with financial assistance. Aubriea’s VR counselor, Ashleigh O’Dell, also helped Aubriea with some of the paperwork and procedural steps regarding Aubriea’s employer and health insurance that Aubriea was struggling with. O’Dell said she was inspired by the tenacity Aubriea displayed both with her physical rehabilitation and her dedication toward returning to work.

“The lack of independence she experienced, and then the 180-degree turnaround she was able to make – it’s just very inspiring,” O’Dell said.

Today, Aubriea works remotely as an advanced medical-support assistant. She helps veterans get the care they’ve earned serving our country by talking to their doctors and helping them get settled in their recovery. Right now she is going through extended training to ensure she’s proficient in all aspects of the position. While the training can be long and arduous, there are enjoyable aspects as well.

“It’s been fun because I’ve been able to talk to a lot of different people,” she said. “I enjoy different personalities, seeing how people laugh and seeing how people take things differently. I just like to make people smile. It makes my day.”

Aubriea is now able to pick up her 4-year-old nephew, something she wouldn’t have been able to do a couple of years ago. She can walk without a walker but does use one for longer distances. She doesn’t mind talking about what’s she’s been through because, in sharing one’s struggles, “you can save the next person’s life.”

“I probably never would have gotten through what I went through without (VR),” she said. “They’ve been there every little step of the way. It was very shocking to me. It didn’t feel like they were doing this as a job. It felt like they really cared.” ■



# SUCCESS STORIES

## ERIC ADAMS

After a hard day on the job, most people like to relax and unwind. But Eric Adams, a former VR client and a welder with more than two decades of experience in the field, didn't allow himself that luxury. He had seen a problem with his profession – newly trained workers coming onto job sites without enough knowledge of how to weld properly in a real-world setting.

So, he spent his nights typing on a laptop, writing the curriculum for the welding school he hoped to open, often while staying in motels on the road for work. Writing the curriculum took five years, and he treated it the same way he treated his welding.

"I made it perfect," he said. "That's what welders do. We're perfectionists. One little word can make a huge difference."

After completing the curriculum and raising the money needed to purchase a building, Grand River Welding Institute opened in Brookfield in March 2018. Eric said his school's instruction in stainless steel and sanitary (food production, breweries, pharmaceutical plants) welding sets Grand River Welding apart from other training programs.

"If you can weld stainless, you can weld anything," he said.

Eric said he was diagnosed with a learning disability as a child. VR paid for him to go to welding school back in 1999. Now, he helps pay it forward with his school and said that most of his students are VR clients.

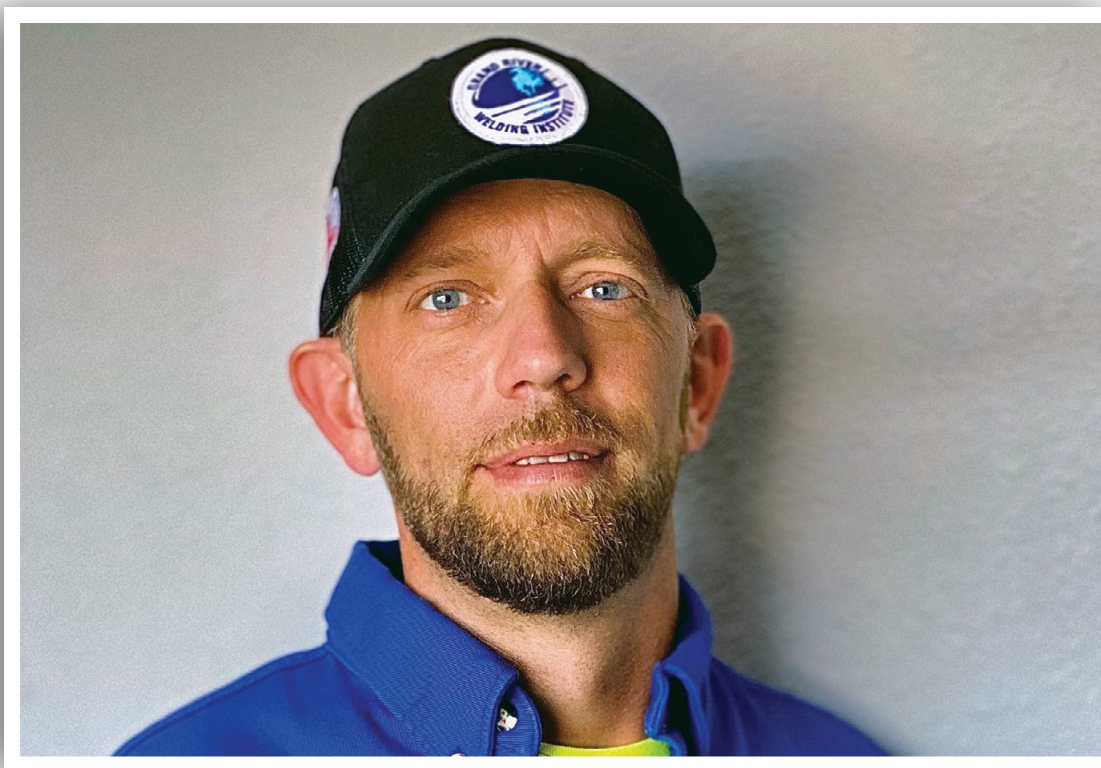
Leslie Stanley, a VR counselor IV in the Chillicothe office, said the fact that Grand River Welding has the only sanitary welding program in the state fills a huge need and offers VR clients the opportunity to learn how to make good money with a relatively short investment of time. She has had VR counselors and administrators from throughout the state tour the school to let them know about this potential opportunity for the Missourians with disabilities they serve.

But beyond the money that can be made as a welder, she said that Eric has a big heart, wants to see his students succeed in life, and often goes above and beyond to help his students when they need it.

"We really try to brainstorm and work together to help clients," she said, "to see what we can do to really prepare people to thrive and not just survive."

Eric said he enjoys being able to give people like himself the opportunity to make a good living. The demand for welders is sky-high and isn't likely to go down.

"Everyone wants power and fuel," he said, "and the person who brings that to you is the welder. Everybody needs a welder. It's all involved with welding." ■



# SUCCESS STORIES

## RHEA M. WILLIS

It happened about a week before her 50th birthday, near the end of August 2021, during what should have been a time of celebration. Rhea Willis had mentioned to her daughters that she was feeling tired after a long day in the classroom in her role as a high school special education teacher for the St. Louis School District. Her oldest decided to stop by, just to check on her mom, and quickly recognized the warning signs of a stroke.

“She said, ‘Mom, we’re going to the hospital. Now.’” Rhea said. “It was very surreal. All of a sudden your whole life is turned upside down.”

Rhea spent several days in the hospital, and when she returned home she needed constant support and care from family and close friends. Despite the long road of physical rehabilitation ahead, she knew she had to return to the classroom.

“I missed my students,” she said. “I call them *my babies* even though they’re teenagers. I love what I do because I can see progress. Some people might have given up on them, but I’ve seen progress in every child I’ve taught.”

Rhea worked on her physical rehabilitation at the SSM Day Institute, which referred her to VR. Her VR counselor, Lindsey Rumpsa, said VR referred Rhea to the Brain Injury Foundation of St. Louis and provided financial support for the foundation’s services. Sarah Davis, the foundation’s director of client services, went above and beyond to ensure that Rhea received every benefit she was entitled to from Rhea’s employer and various insurance companies. Rhea described Davis affectionately as “my advocate,” and Davis said Rhea showed an uncommon dedication toward the countless hours of physical and mental exercises that make up the rehabilitation process.

“She is joyful,” Davis said. “She is grateful. She is tenacious. She doesn’t quit. That’s what it takes to get back to work after a brain injury.”

Rhea returned to the classroom for the start of the 2022-23 school year, about a year after she experienced her stroke. She hopes sharing her story will let others know that “there is hope. Never give up when you’re trying to recover from a traumatic event like a stroke. Let your mind and body heal. Give them time.”

And there has been an unexpected result from what Rhea has been through over the past year — an even stronger bond with the students she inspires.

“This made me an even better teacher because I know the challenges my students have gone through. Now I advocate even harder for the students I educate.” ■





# SATISFACTION SURVEY

Satisfaction with staff and services is a VR priority, and the SRC's Program Evaluation Committee continues to work with VR on reviewing and analyzing feedback from individuals who receive VR services. This feedback is shared with management, supervisors, and counselors and is used as a tool to improve services, evaluate staff performance, and determine training needs.

During PY 2021, survey letters and postage-paid envelopes were mailed to a random sample of 10,389 individuals at various stages in the rehabilitation process. Survey feedback was positive. Results showed that 98 percent of those surveyed felt they were treated with respect, 96 percent felt they knew the purpose of VR, and 96 percent felt that staff was available when needed. The overall results are listed on page 22.

## SURVEY COMMENTS

*"I'm very grateful for this program to help me find a job and stay employed.  
It's very much a life-changing experience."*

*"VR opened up a door of opportunities for me and increased my job satisfaction and salary."*

*"VR helped me find a job that understood my abilities."*

*"I went from no opportunities to success."*

*"I was at the worst time in my life, and my counselor listened and gave me hope  
that we would find me a job."*

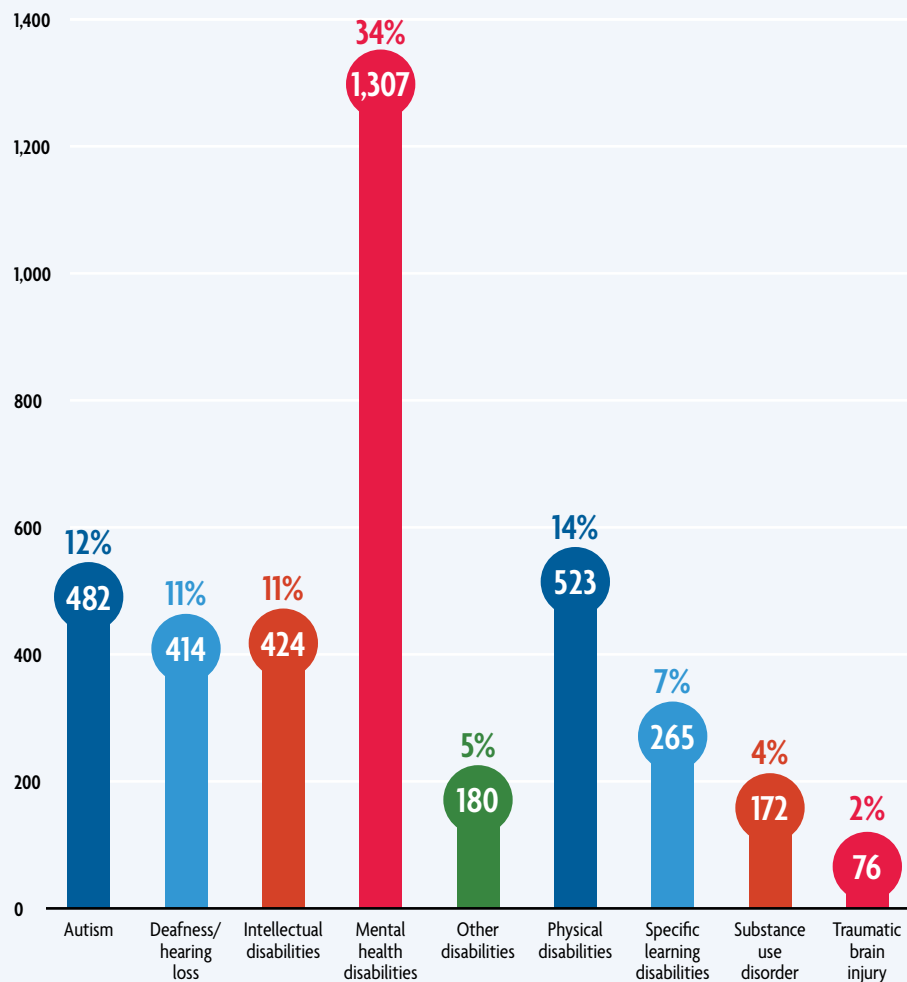
# SATISFACTION SURVEY

SURVEY RESULTS (Specific group responses)	TOTAL RESPONSES RECEIVED	STAFF WAS AVAILABLE		STAFF TREATED ME WITH RESPECT		I KNEW PURPOSE OF VR SERVICES		COUNSELOR HELPED PLAN SERVICES		COUNSELOR EXPLAINED CHOICES	
		YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Total responses	1,084	96%	4%	98%	2%	96%	4%	94%	6%	95%	5%
Open cases	504	97%	3%	99%	1%	97%	3%	96%	4%	96%	4%
Successful outcomes	415	99%	1%	98%	2%	96%	4%	96%	4%	98%	2%
Unsuccessful outcomes; closed before services	42	90%	10%	93%	7%	95%	5%	83%	17%	92%	8%
Unsuccessful outcomes; closed after services	123	86%	14%	96%	4%	93%	7%	81%	19%	88%	12%
Supported employment individuals	330	97%	3%	98%	2%	98%	2%	95%	5%	96%	4%
Individuals under 25 at application	420	96%	4%	98%	2%	97%	3%	94%	6%	95%	5%
Individuals with autism	176	96%	4%	98%	2%	97%	3%	95%	5%	95%	5%
Individuals with deafness/hearing loss	123	97%	3%	98%	2%	92%	8%	95%	5%	98%	2%
Individuals with mental health disabilities	297	96%	4%	99%	1%	97%	3%	95%	5%	95%	5%
Individuals with physical disabilities	150	95%	5%	97%	3%	96%	4%	93%	7%	96%	4%
Individuals with traumatic brain injury	35	94%	6%	97%	3%	91%	9%	94%	6%	94%	6%
Individuals with other disabilities	192	98%	2%	99%	1%	97%	3%	93%	7%	96%	4%

# PROGRAM DATA

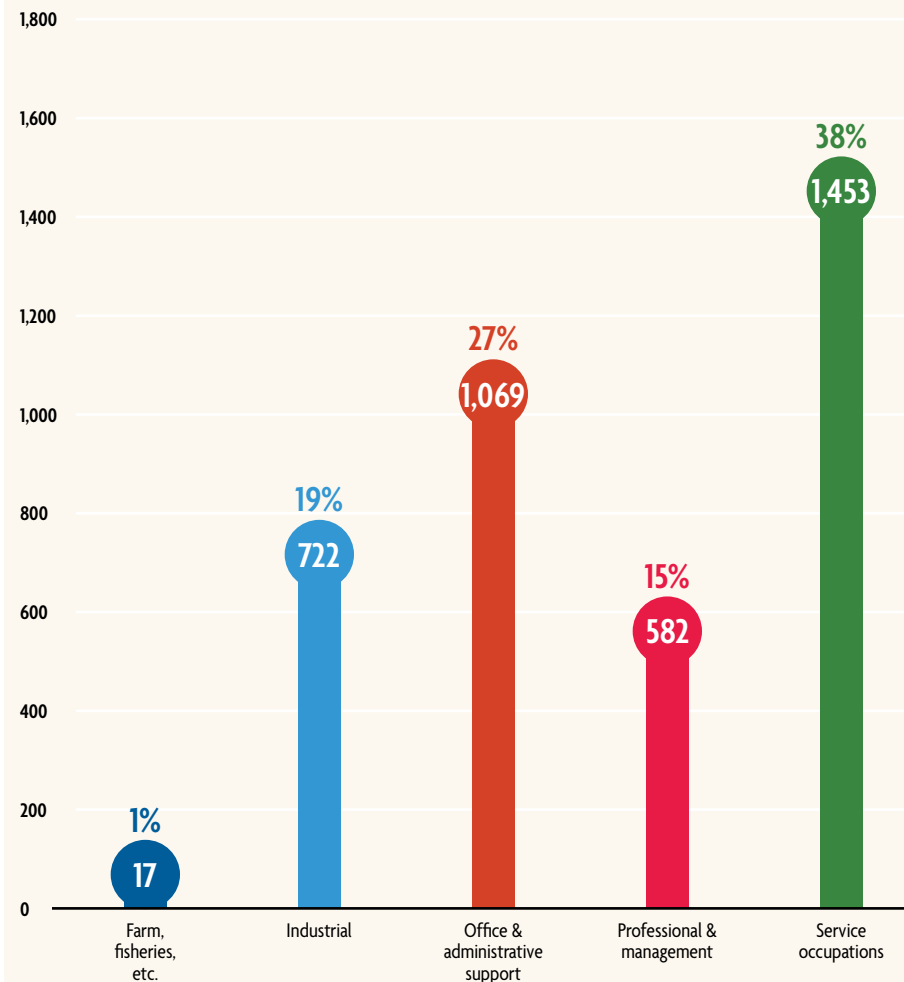
## DISABILITY CATEGORIES

3,843 Individuals With Successful Employment Outcomes: PY 2021



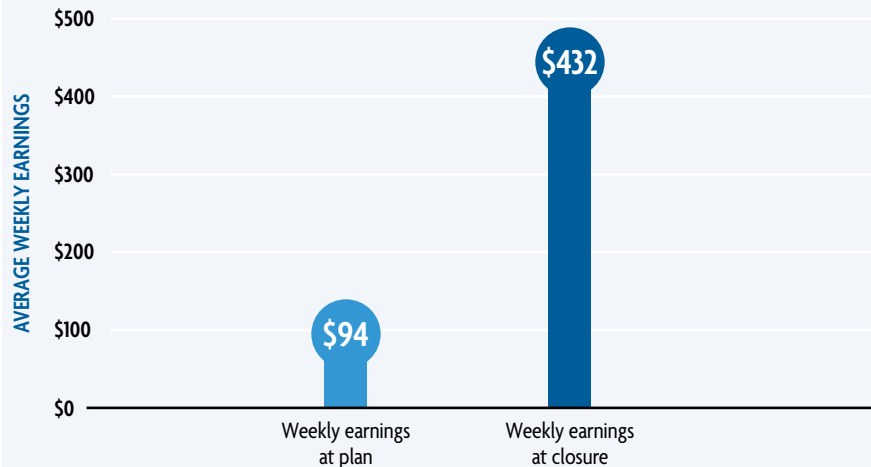
## OCCUPATIONS

3,843 Individuals With Successful Employment Outcomes: PY 2021



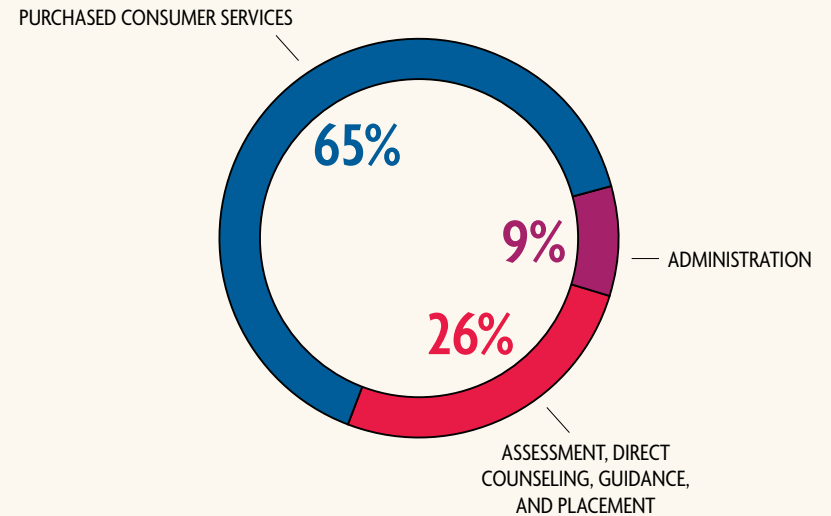
# PROGRAM DATA

## IMPACT OF VR SERVICES: PY 2021



With an increase in average weekly earnings of \$338 for 3,843 individuals with successful outcomes, the total annual increase in income amounted to \$67,544,568.

## EXPENDITURES: PY 2021



## GENDER

Individuals With Successful Employment Outcomes: PY 2021

GENDER	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Male	2,167	56%
Female	1,662	43%
Did not wish to self-identify	14	1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,843</b>	<b>100%</b>

## ETHNICITY

Individuals With Successful Employment Outcomes: PY 2021

ETHNICITY	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
White	2,940	77%
African-American	685	18%
Hispanic	117	3%
American Indian	51	1%
Asian	40	<1%
Pacific Islander	10	<1%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,843</b>	<b>100%</b>

## AGE

Individuals With Successful Employment Outcomes: PY 2021

AGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Less than 25	1,517	40%
25-34	774	20%
35-44	553	14%
45-54	457	12%
55-64	374	10%
65 and over	168	4%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,843</b>	<b>100%</b>



# OFFICES

## 1) CAPE GIRARDEAU VR

3102 Blattner Drive, Suite 103  
Cape Girardeau, MO 63703  
Toll-free: 877-702-9883

## 2) CENTRAL OFFICE VR

3024 Dupont Circle  
Jefferson City, MO 65109  
Toll-free: 877-222-8963

## 3) CHILLICOTHE VR

603 W. Mohawk Road  
Chillicothe, MO 64601  
Toll-free: 866-572-4049

## 4) COLUMBIA VR

900 W. Nifong Blvd., Suite 210  
Columbia, MO 65203  
Toll-free: 877-222-8961

## 5) FARMINGTON VR

901 Progress Drive, Suite 100  
Farmington, MO 63640  
Toll-free: 800-640-7110

## 6) HANNIBAL VR

112 Jaycee Drive  
Hannibal, MO 63401  
Toll-free: 877-222-8960

## 7) JEFFERSON CITY VR

1500 Southridge Drive, Suite 200  
Jefferson City, MO 65109  
Toll-free: 866-661-9106

## 8) JOPLIN VR

801 E. 15th St., Suite B  
Joplin, MO 64804  
Toll-free: 877-222-8964

## 9) KANSAS CITY DOWNTOWN VR

615 E. 13th St., Suite 111  
Kansas City, MO 64106  
Toll-free: 866-971-8568

## 10) KANSAS CITY EAST/ TRANSITION VR

Joseph P. Teasdale State Office Building  
8800 E. 63rd St., Suite 260  
Raytown, MO 64133  
Toll-free: 866-831-1363

## 11) KANSAS CITY NORTH VR

8030 N. Oak Trafficway  
Kansas City, MO 64118  
Toll-free: 877-270-0198

## 12) KIRKSVILLE VR

1612 N. Osteopathy, Suite B  
Kirksville, MO 63501  
Toll-free: 877-222-8962

## 13) NEVADA VR

621 E. Highland Ave., Suite 2  
Nevada, MO 64772  
Toll-free: 800-598-3471

## 14) POPLAR BLUFF VR

1903 Northwood Drive, Suite 3  
Poplar Bluff, MO 63901  
Toll-free: 800-281-9894

## 15) ROLLA VR

1101A Kingshighway  
Rolla, MO 65401  
Toll-free: 800-890-2867

## 16) SEDALIA VR

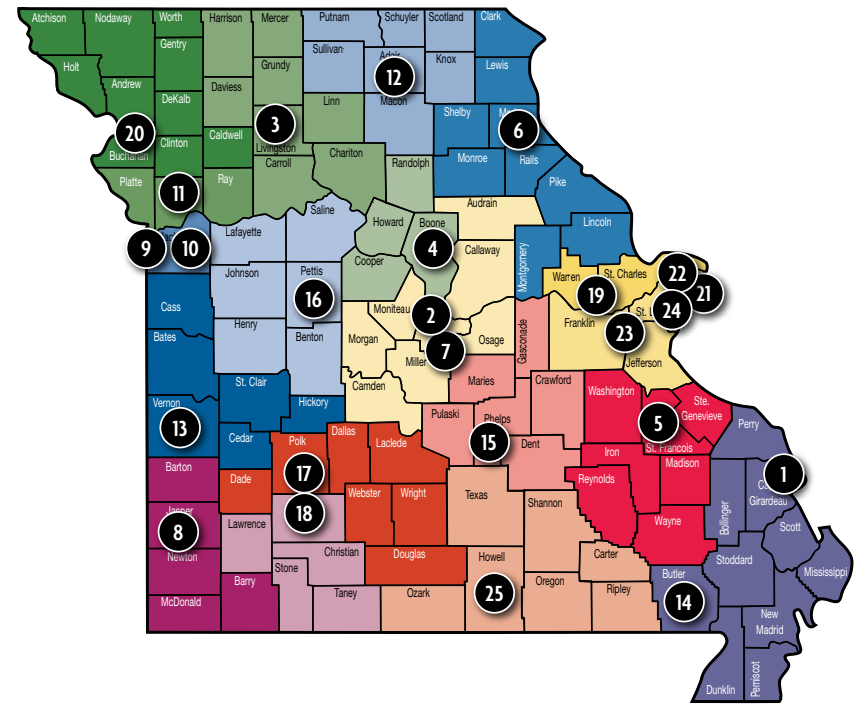
2115 W. Broadway Blvd.  
Sedalia, MO 65301  
Toll-free: 844-487-0495

## 17) SPRINGFIELD NORTH VR

613 E. Kearney St.  
Springfield, MO 65803  
Toll-free: 877-222-8965

## 18) SPRINGFIELD SOUTH VR

1735 W. Catalpa St., Suite C  
Springfield, MO 65807  
Toll-free: 877-222-8967



## 19) ST. CHARLES VR

3737 Harry S. Truman Blvd., Suite 400  
St. Charles, MO 63301  
Phone: 636-940-3300

## 20) ST. JOSEPH VR

State Office Building  
525 Jules St., Room 201  
St. Joseph, MO 64501  
Toll-free: 877-702-9876

## 21) ST. LOUIS DOWNTOWN VR

220 S. Jefferson Ave., Suite 110  
St. Louis, MO 63103  
Toll-free: 866-971-8569

## 22) ST. LOUIS NORTH VR

4040 Seven Hills Drive, Suite 257  
Florissant, MO 63033  
Phone: 314-475-7999

## 23) ST. LOUIS SOUTH VR

St. Louis South Service Center  
7545 S. Lindbergh Blvd., Suite 100  
St. Louis, MO 63125  
Toll-free: 877-222-8968

## 24) ST. LOUIS WEST/TRANSITION VR

9900 Page Ave., Suite 104  
St. Louis, MO 63132  
Phone: 314-587-4877

## 25) WEST PLAINS VR

3417 Division Drive, Suite 2  
West Plains, MO 65775  
Toll-free: 877-222-8959



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*The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program receives 78.7 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For Federal Fiscal Year 2022, the total amount of grant funds awarded was \$66,571,077. The remaining 21.3 percent of the costs (\$18,017,331) was funded by state matching funds. The Supported Employment (SE) program receives 95 percent of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For Federal Fiscal Year 2022, the total amount of grant funds awarded was \$270,588. The remaining 5 percent of the costs (\$14,241) was funded by state matching funds. The Independent Living (IL) program receives a portion of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For Federal Fiscal Year 2022, the total amount of grant funds awarded was \$338,717 (90 percent). The remaining 10 percent (\$37,635) was funded by state matching funds. The IL program also received additional state funding for an overall total of \$5,453,103.*